

Covenant Crisis
Frequently Asked Questions concerning the
Modern Controversy over Human Sexuality
Addressed by Pastor Jay

1. Q. What is homosexual?
 - A. This is a man-made word that describes human behavior, attraction and/or preference involving or drawn toward intimate sexual activity between two men or two women. Just like other words that describe behaviors, attractions or preferences among human beings, it is an important word because such things are a real and powerful force in people's lives. It is a word like others—*violent, passive, musical, creative, aggressive, vegetarian, quiet*—which can helpfully and truthfully describe people and how they behave. None of these words, though, offers a valid *identity* which justifies randomly punching someone in the nose (*because I am a "violent"*) or singing loudly where people are sleeping (*because I am a "musical"*). Similarly, "homosexual" is not a real, God-given, inescapable *identity* that offers justification for wrong behavior.

2. Q. Is it a sin to *be* a homosexual?
 - A. No. You can mean two different things when you say "I am a homosexual," and neither one is sin in and of itself.
 - a. You can mean that you perceive yourself *to be made as a particular kind of person*, one whose genetic make-up and/or God-given identity means you must engage in sexual activity with another male (or another female) as your only right and proper expression of sexual intimacy. There is no such "kind of person." No such identity actually exists. We have made it up. God, the Bible and reality itself knows of no such category of people. There are tall people, short people, Hispanic people, Caucasian people, male people and female people, but there are no real "homosexual" people. It is an attraction, preference and/or behavior to which we have attached an identity. God makes no such attachment. Thus to say "I am homosexual" is no more a sin than to say "I am a unicorn" or "I am a Thermian from the Klatu Nebula." It is a fantasy. If you truly believe you are such a one, you are sadly deceived but not necessarily sinning. Not until you *act* sinfully because of your misperception.
 - i. I would hasten to add here that I am now firmly convinced that there is no such thing as a "heterosexual" either. Again, it is a fine word for describing observed human attraction and behavior, but it is not anyone's real *identity*. I can justify no behavior by saying I am a "heterosexual." I am a human being made in God's image, and I am an adult male. God says as a human male I am supposed to behave in certain ways toward other species, toward children and toward other males (no sex) and in certain ways toward women (no sex or sex with just one who is my wife for life).

- ii. The fact that our culture now affirms and legislates according to its faith in a real “homosexual/heterosexual” (rather than the basic “male/female”) identity does not make it real over and against the revelation of God, the witness of human anatomy, the inflexible standards of egg and sperm biology, or the realities of public health liabilities.
 - b. You can mean that you understand yourself *to be attracted to, or have a preference for, sexual intimacy with people of your own sex* if you were going to engage in such activity. This “same-sex attraction” is every bit as real, powerful and mysterious as “opposite-sex attraction.” Clearly people can find themselves in a place of “same-sex attraction” through circumstances beyond their control—environments, relationships, genetic factors, etc.—and with no wrongdoing on their part. We are all broken people in a fallen world in need of redemption from beyond ourselves. Such an attraction, or preference or orientation, is not a sin. It is a reality that must be managed, just as another person must manage his or her “opposite-sex attraction.” This side of heaven, we are all oriented toward sin. Failing to manage ourselves, whatever our attractions or preferences might be, we tend toward sinful behavior—cherishing lustful thoughts, sharing foul words, engaging in immoral actions. And such behavior is sin.
3. Q. Is it a sin to engage in homosexual acts with another man or another woman?
- A. Yes. The Bible is clear and unequivocal (without conflicting voices) on this. (See the Scripture references on our Covenant Crisis link). Most notably, Paul calls such behavior part of the pagans’ pattern of sin and something that is “against nature” in Romans 1. This is a letter from after Christ’s life and after the rejecting of certain dietary laws and other parts of the Jewish Holiness Code because of Christ’s once-and-for-all atoning and unifying death and resurrection. The closest Biblical parallels to homosexual prohibitions are found in other “indecencies” such as incest and bestiality.
- Romans 1:26* *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*
4. Q. Do people who perceive themselves to be homosexual (living with same-sex attraction) have to become heterosexual to be right with God?
- A. No. No one needs to become a “heterosexual” (there is no such thing—see above). Everyone needs to become a child of God. No one needs to trade a same-sex partner for an opposite-sex one. Everyone needs to submit to God’s good will and design for human health and wholeness (which includes no necessary component of sexual activity at all). Everyone needs to manage his or her attractions, God helping us!, for the good of all people and the glory of God.

5. Isn't it unfair that people with same-sex attraction have no right and righteous way to give and receive sexual love with another person while those with opposite-sex attraction can get married and have sex while God and the Church say "This is good?"

A. Yes. It is quite unfair. And it is unfair that a person attracted to his or her own sex has the opportunity to deny himself or herself for love of God in a way I will never be able to do. And it is unfair that God seems to care a lot about abundant love and not so much about abundant sex, or even sex at all. And it is unfair that women can have babies and men cannot. And it is unfair that people are so often disappointed and deceived in their heterosexual love-making, thinking it could be the thing that makes life worthwhile (like in the movies), and then it doesn't. And it is unfair that God seems to favor issues like holiness and faithfulness and righteousness far above fairness in any sense we can observe and measure.

6. Q. Isn't it judgmental to say that homosexual people are sinning?

A. No more than when a mother "judges" that her 4-year-old's sudden desire to run out into a busy street is an unhealthy one that must be restrained with all necessary force. The two issues are these:

1. Is homosexual behavior sin or not? Does it, therefore, dishonor God and harm people?

2. Will we treat others like friends we love or like things that are unimportant to us. If homosexual behavior is in fact sin (as the Bible teaches), we must speak the truth because we love people, like that mother loves her child, and are not willing to "be nice" and ignore them as they do harm to themselves and others.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

– Proverbs 27:6

7. Q. Didn't Jesus teach us to love and not to judge?

A. Yes and no. Show me a mother and father who refuse to "judge" their children's behavior, and I will show you parents lacking in love. Show me a brother or sister who only says "That's nice. Whatever you want," when you tell them about your foolish plans to behave badly, and I will show you a loveless sibling. Later on in Romans, Paul the Apostle says this:

Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Real love is courageously discerning. It hates evil because evil destroys people whom we love. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery (John 8) that He didn't condemn her (and He, the sinless Savior, the Son of God could have done so). And then he told her to "go and sin no more." He didn't say "Adultery is no big deal, so don't worry about it." When Jesus said "Do not judge, or you too will be judged," (Matthew 7:1) He was warning us against our natural inclination to make ourselves judges over others, as though we were the ones they needed to answer to. He was telling us to make a habit of judging ourselves rather than others, but he was not telling us never to "judge" others' behavior so we could warn them and lovingly help them toward greater health and wholeness.

8. Q. Hasn't science proved that people are "born homosexual?"
- A. No. Rumors to this effect have been greatly exaggerated because people seem so badly to want this to be true. No scientific study has shown this to be the case. (Two Books you could consult on this for further information are Robert Gagnon's The Bible and Homosexual Practice and Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth by Jeffrey Satinover). It has been shown that genetics seems to be a factor that leads toward same-sex attraction but only as a secondary influence (far less significant than environmental factors) and not as a primary determiner. My genetic code said I would have blue eyes, and so I do. No one has shown that anybody anywhere has a code that said he will have sex with other men.
9. Q. What if two men or two women, each with little or no interest in heterosexual marriage, have a special bond, a deep friendship, and decide to share their lives, live together, make a home of loving hospitality together, maybe adopt children who desperately need to be loved and cared for...? Is this wrong?
- A. No. Such sharing glorifies God. It simply must not involve physical, sexual intimacy (which would be a vain attempt to manufacture the God-blessed, life-producing physical union of a man and woman without benefit of the opposite sex partner).
10. Q. I have a beloved friend or family member who perceives himself/herself to be a homosexual. How can I support a church that condemns someone I love?
- A. The same way you would support a family member who condemns your church. By being truthful with your thoughts and feelings and beliefs and by lovingly and compassionately and patiently and kindly and gently and honestly listening and responding to theirs.
- First, we must realize that no one gets to claim exemption from the "perceived condemnation" dynamic in this cultural debate. If a loved one says they would never set foot in our church because we are holier-than-thou, narrow-minded, judgmental people who would not welcome them (or some variation on these themes), are they not possibly saying "I condemn them because they are wrong about me and my chosen life-style." Why is their condemnation of people trying to be faithful as God's church not an issue? If we insist that "condemnation" is the essential dynamic in this debate, aren't we simply choosing which "condemnation" we prefer: My friend's or my church's?
- Second, it is not our intent to condemn but to inform and to be partners with God who alone can redeem and transform. God is the Judge, not us. When we say "homosexual behavior is a sin," we believe it is just like when we say "adultery is a sin" or "lying is a sin" or "worshipping false gods is a sin" or "gossiping is a sin." We are simply sharing the truth God has revealed through His Word and Spirit to us. We want people to be able to make decisions in the light, based on what is right and good and true and real, rather than stumbling around in the dark of ignorance, moral compromise and human pride.

11. Q. Why does the church have to get mixed up in this rancorous cultural conflict?
- A. Because God's people are called to be "salt and light," agents of preservation and illumination in a dying and decaying, dark and deluded world. And because the question of homosexual orientation and practice continues to come to God's church from people seeking support and justification for their chosen and cherished form of rebellion against our Creator God. States are voting about this issue. Sitcoms are promoting these attractions. Schools are teaching and modeling this behavior. The Church and its people will truly serve no one by remaining safe and silent about something so important.
12. Q. Why are we so focused on this particular "sin?" Aren't there lots of others that are worse and that we aren't talking about? Aren't we sort of picking on homosexuals because they're an easy target and we don't like them?
- A. Yes there are many other sins that are more damaging to people... Materialism is a more widespread and culturally accepted problem. Heterosexual sin (adultery, child abuse, rampant pornography) is far more prevalent and hurts far more people. But... no one has seriously asked the Church to speak in favor of any of these behaviors. There is no "Presbyterians for Pornography" or "Parents for Pedophilia" organization pushing the Church to accept their new understanding of proper behavior. Yes, we are all subject to a prevailing Materialistic Idolatry in America, but nobody as far as I know has used a pulpit to preach the glories of a life devoted to acquiring more things. Not so regarding homosexual sin. People have incessantly demanded that the Church speak for God a word of acceptance concerning homosexual behavior. For decades the question has been asked of Assemblies and Councils and Churches. Over and over and over. In our own denomination, we have voted at various levels of church leadership hundreds and hundreds of times. For over 30 years, at the national level we have compassionately and faithfully said "No" to homosexual practice. And still the homosexual movement and "progressive" church members have insisted that we ask and answer again. Again and again. Until this year, foolishly and unfaithfully we said "Yes." It is the height of hypocrisy to say the Church has set out to pick on a marginalized group of people. The Church has been asked to give an answer, over and over, on this issue, and so we have. And so we will.
13. Q. Won't our opposition to homosexual practice tell people who need the love of Jesus that they are not welcome here?
- A. Maybe. But please try to hear this: All are welcome at Covenant Presbyterian Church. We are all people who struggle with one kind of sin or another. We are all people who need Jesus who died for us and was raised to life and calls us to do die to ourselves for Him so He can raise us to eternal life (or is it the other way around?). We will try to love you here, and we will ask you to try to love us. And we will do this by trying to tell each other the truth.
- If people choose to say we are "unwelcoming" because they honestly believe we are misguided concerning "gays" and "lesbians" and the "bisexuals" and the "transgendered" among us, we will hope and pray that the message of God's love doesn't get lost in the misunderstanding. We must be wary, though, of trying to

draw people to our church on their terms rather than on God's, for then we will defraud people and dishonor God. Nobody comes to Jesus on their own terms. All must come not as "good people" willing to add their names to Jesus' list of outstanding assets for His kingdom of undiscerning love but as "desperately lost people" who need to be redeemed from their divinely-condemned life of sin and humanly-unavoidable eternal death. To tell people, in God's name, that their particular sin is no problem and nothing to repent of, is horrific. It is a callous and cowardly expression of our apathy toward one another and willingness to trivialize our need for healing and salvation.

Our first word is this: God loves you, friend, just the way you are. But on its heals comes a second word that is like it: God loves you too much, partner, to leave you the way you are. Let's work together toward holiness and goodness and the glory of God.

I have often said that I would be delighted to have every person in Reno who perceives him- or herself to be homosexual come worship with us here at Covenant. They will hear a whole lot about the greatness, goodness and love of God and about Jesus who died to save. They will hear very little about human sexuality. But if anyone asks about homosexuality (as many people are doing today), I will do my best to offer all the truth with all the love God has given me to share.